

## Highly Restrictive Diets

**Definition/  
cut-off value**

Diets that are very low in calories, severely limit intake of important food sources of nutrients or otherwise involve high-risk eating patterns.

**Participant  
category and  
priority level**
**Category**
**Priority**

Pregnant Women	IV
Breastfeeding Women	IV
Non-Breastfeeding Women	VI
Infants	V
Children	IV

**Justification**

Highly restrictive diets prevent adequate intake of nutrients, interfere with growth and development and may lead to other adverse physiological effects. Given the health and nutrition risks associated with highly restrictive diets, WIC can help the participant achieve an adequate diet to optimize health during critical periods of growth as well as for the long term.

**Clarifications/  
Guidelines**

Before assigning this risk code, be sure the highly restrictive diet is documented on the diet/health history form.

The prevalence of highly restrictive diets is believed to be quite low. The Institute of Medicine states these diets severely limit nutrient intake, may interfere with growth if consumed regularly, and if very low in calories may lead to a number of adverse physiological effects. In most instances, these diets will be identified as other dietary risk conditions. General guidelines to follow for this risk condition include, but are not limited to:

- C intentionally restricting dietary intake for weight loss during pregnancy and lactation
- C intentionally restricting dietary intake to cause weight loss or to prevent weight gain problems in children or infants
- C avoiding one or more food groups in the diet on a regular basis (this implies an intentional routine avoidance of one or more food groups, rather than the occasional omission of a food group from the diet)
- C fad diets, i.e., following a nutritionally deficient diet, such as a macrobiotic diet, a high protein/low carbohydrate diet, etc.

We are not identifying a calorie level to evaluate highly restrictive diets. Calorie counts are tedious to perform and prone to error. If you see a diet that appears to be highly restrictive and severely limiting in nutrients, use your professional judgment and document and counsel appropriately.

**References**

Institute of Medicine: WIC Nutrition Risk Criteria: A Scientific Assessment; 1996; pp. 260-1.

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